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Austin, Ides of March, 2020

It is odd watching the city shut down,
one venue at a time. SxSW, gone.
Our church went virtual a week ago.
Days before, the choir director had called,
“We will not meet or sing this Sunday,”
an odd phrasing. The monthly poetry meeting
was cancelled after the feature backed out.
Our acting president has been working
seven days a week to keep the nursing homes
clean, if not safe. The writing group
is moving on-line. My extraverted wife
looks forward to it. This surprises me.

I can imagine a white pastor preaching
to a video camera in an empty sanctuary.
But Black pastors? Struggling to preach call
with no response. Can there be worship
without congregation, musicians, and choir?

The university and the schools
shut down yesterday as the first
COVID-19 cases in Austin
were announced. Full baskets of
toilet paper, ramen, paper towels,
bottled water, and pasta queued up
with six packs of liter Cokes
straddling the rails. We are using
old rags as paper towels.

Like hearing a train start.
The slam slam slam
of each car starting up
is coming closer.

I know how the train starting up ends.
How does this end?